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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PESHAWAR 000043

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: FATA: "VICTORY" IN BAJAUR?

REF: A) PESHAWAR 0039 B) 08 PESHAWAR 0435

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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)
Summary

11. (C) Frontier Corps Commander General Tariq Khan announced that FC forces had "secured" the Bajaur agency on February 28. While Frontier Corps certainly appears to have made important progress, Tariq's reference to "secured" likely refers primarily to the lines of communications, particularly roads. The fate of Tehrik-i Taliban deputy leader Faqir Mohammad remains unclear although he appears to have escaped. As difficult as this operation was for Pakistani forces, the harder part is still ahead -- holding onto territory reclaimed from the militants and persuading internally displaced Bajauris to return home. We are following up with Frontier Corps for a more detailed assessment of conditions on the ground and possible opportunities to expand our assistance. End Summary.

Bajaur "Secured"

12. (U) During a February 28 press tour of Bajaur that included international journalists, Frontier Corps Commander General Tariq Khan announced that FC forces had "secured" the agency. Backed by tanks and armored personnel carriers, Frontier Corps forces, General Tariq said, had captured the last remaining militant strongholds in Mahmond tehsil, approximately 30 kilometers northwest of Khar. Tariq said his forces had defeated the militants after a seven month long military operation in Bajaur and claimed the Taliban command structure in Bajaur had collapsed.

13. (C) Bajaur, particularly areas west of Khar bordering Afghanistan, have been dominated by militants, led by Tehrik-i Nafaz-i Shariat-i Mohammadi (TNSM) leader Faqir Mohammad, who also serves as deputy leader of Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan (TTP). General Tariq acknowledged that as many as five top militant commanders had escaped but reported that 1,500 militants, half of them foreigners, were killed in the operation thus far. Bajaur-based Faqir Mohammad may still be in the area with other militants leaders who "escaped" the current operation.

14. (C) Pakistan security forces' seven month battle for Bajaur agency began in early August when a re-positioning of Frontier Corps forces sparked a confrontation with militants at Loyesam, a post at a key intersection that controls access to the Afghan border and Khar. The militants besieged and overran Loyesam.

15. (C) Initially seen as a few weeks' work, the Bajaur operation stretched into months as the military met fierce militant resistance that was dug in hard with well-engineered cave systems in some areas. The level of resistance and the discovery of such a sophisticated militant defenses hardened the military's response. The militants were occasionally supported by fighters coming from Afghanistan to attack government positions.

Security Forces Welcomed

16. (C) Hundreds of tribesmen welcomed security forces in Omaray, Mamond Tehsil, Bajaur Agency and reportedly pledged continued cooperation with security forces according to press reporting. Residents said it was the first time since 6 August that the Taliban were not patrolling the roads in Bajaur agency. During late August Tribes in the Salarzai and Khar areas both raised armed lashkars (volunteer tribal militias) to fight the militants with some localized success. These were highlighted by Pakistani Officials as a sign of the unpopularity of the militants. Estimates of the number of volunteers were as high as ten thousand. (Ref. B).

Civilians In Need Of Essentials

17. (C) Despite General Tariq's statement that Bajaur is "secured" there are mixed indicators about whether it is safe enough for civilians to return. Bajaur parliamentary Shahkatullah told Embassy Polcouns February 28 that there were

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still too many taliban in the area. Approximately 5,000 homes were destroyed and hundreds of shops and other properties damaged during the fighting, leaving many civilians in "dire" need of food and other essential items according to the Bajaur Political agent. Villages like Loysam were completely flattened in the fighting. (Note: We are following up with Frontier Corps and other local officials to obtain a more detailed assessment of damage, needs, and security conditions.)

Comment

18. (C) While Frontier Corps certainly appears to have made important progress, Tariq's reference to "secured" likely refers primarily to the lines of communications, particularly roads. The fate of Tehrik-i Taliban deputy leader Faqir Mohammad remains unclear, but he is likely one of the militant leaders who Tariq acknowledged had managed to escape. The apparent survival of Bajaur's militant leadership, who will likely be looking for means to return to the agency, underscores once again the importance of leaving a sufficient "hold" force in Bajaur which may be difficult to accomplish given operational requirements in other areas.

TRACY